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## **Promoting inclusive participation in parliamentary life: gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies**

### **Report<sup>1</sup>**

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Rapporteur: Ms Maryna Bardina, Ukraine, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Committee: Doc. 15291, reference 4590 of 21 June 2021.

## **A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>**

1. Parliaments in Europe remain male-dominated, including in leadership and decision-making positions, and such under-representation of women in parliamentary life undermines democratic institutions and processes. Equal participation of women and men, in all their diversity, in every area of society and employment, is a human rights matter: their equal representation in parliamentary life is essential for well-functioning democracies and good governance.
2. Parliaments are also workplaces where many elected representatives and members of staff are parents. Yet the absence of adapted infrastructures and accessible premises, including childcare facilities, equipped areas for breastfeeding, and requirements such as physical presence, create additional barriers to their participation in parliamentary life, especially for women – further exacerbating their under-representation.
3. Members of parliament, like all persons in employment, need a healthy and sustainable work-life balance, yet family and care responsibilities continue to affect mostly women's participation in parliamentary life. Male parliamentarians need to be key actors to bring transformative change to parliamentary life, working together with women to achieve gender equality in parliaments.
4. At the same time, inclusion is not limited to levelling up women's participation in parliamentary life and accommodating the needs of young parents. The needs of other groups with specific requirements, such as persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility, either as members of parliament or parliamentary staff, must also be taken into account.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly underlines the need to meet relevant targets under the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, including target 5.5 (under SDG 5): "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"; target 10.2 (under SDG 10): "Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status"; and target 16.7 (under SDG 16): "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".
6. The Assembly welcomes the Pact for the Future, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2024, and its action 8 whereby States have undertaken to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
7. The Assembly further welcomes General Recommendation no. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, adopted in October 2024 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
8. The Assembly recalls the Kigali Declaration, adopted at the 145th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in October 2022, on "Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world".
9. The Assembly further recalls its Resolution 2386 (2021) "Enhancing participation of women from under-represented groups in political and public decision making"; Resolution 2274 (2019) "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment"; Resolution 2222 (2018) "Promoting diversity and equality in politics"; Resolution 2155 (2017) "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue"; and Resolution 2111 (2016) "Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation".
10. The Assembly calls on the member and observer States of the Council of Europe, and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly:
  - 10.1. with regard to gender equality, to:
    - 10.1.1. ensure the balanced participation of women and men in all areas of parliamentary life, and especially in decision-making roles;
    - 10.1.2. set up a gender parity goal for political representation in national parliaments, conduct a national assessment of the situation, and develop a strategic plan to reach this goal through specific measures;
    - 10.1.3. analyse the composition of national parliaments with an intersectional perspective, collect disaggregated data and support research on the participation of women, including those from under-represented groups, in political decision making;
    - 10.1.4. consider using the available tools by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to

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<sup>2</sup> Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the Committee on 12 May 2025.

assess the representation of women and men in national parliaments, so that appropriate measures can be put in place;

10.1.5. raise awareness about the impact of sexism and gender-based violence in political life, including the impact this has on the level of participation of women parliamentarians;

10.1.6. promote and support networks for women parliamentarians, including women's caucuses in national parliaments;

10.1.7. develop specific programmes to engage with male politicians as transformative actors, working together with female leaders to achieve gender equality in politics;

10.1.8. review national legislation and repeal, where applicable, legal measures restricting the right of women parliamentarians with children to participate in business trips and carry out paid overtime work to which they have agreed;

10.2. with regard to the accessibility of parliaments, to:

10.2.1. make fully accessible both the parliamentary buildings and the work of parliaments for persons with disabilities and reduced mobility, including members of parliament, parliamentary staff and visitors;

10.2.2. establish clear rules and procedures so that members of parliament and parliamentary staff can enter the premises with children and infants;

10.2.3. formally allow for breastfeeding in parliamentary premises; and consider providing nurseries, baby feeding and changing rooms in parliamentary premises;

10.2.4. encourage co-operation between parliaments and relevant non-governmental organisations to carry out audits on the accessibility of parliamentary premises and work;

10.3. with regard to inclusive policies in parliaments, to:

10.3.1. develop internal policies aimed to facilitate a better work-life balance for members of parliament and parliamentary staff, including the regulation of working hours aimed at preventing late sessions and meetings, and aligning sitting times with the school calendar;

10.3.2. adopt the necessary measures so that parliamentarians and parliamentary staff can benefit from parental leave;

10.3.3. consider establishing procedures for substitution/proxy voting or distance voting in certain cases;

10.3.4. review the implementation of Assembly Resolution 2155 (2017) "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue", as regards the accessibility of electoral processes, information and procedures; and take the necessary measures to address any existing gaps;

10.3.5. promote support networks for minority groups in national parliaments;

10.3.6. adopt, review and/or update, as appropriate, Codes of Conduct for parliamentarians and staff members to address abuse, sexual and psychological harassment, sexism and discriminatory behaviour, and introduce reporting procedures and sanctions in case of breach, in line with Resolution 2274 (2019)<sup>1</sup> "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment";

10.3.7. organise training on inclusiveness, intersectionality and gender equality, covering relevant policies and reporting mechanisms, for all members of parliament and parliamentary staff.

11. The Assembly also encourages political parties in Council of Europe members States to:

11.1. adopt measures to promote the participation of women and persons from under-represented groups in their internal structures, including at leadership levels;

11.2. assess, and develop a long-term strategy to address the needs of persons from under-represented groups – such as persons with disabilities and those facing multiple and intersectional discrimination, with a view to facilitating their participation in political life; and organise capacity building trainings, in accessible formats, to enable such participation;

11.3. establish rules for the selection of candidates for elections with a view to ensuring the active promotion of gender equality and diversity;

- 11.4. review their internal composition, policies and working practices, for example through the use of ODHIR's assessment tools, with a view to determining measures to increase participation and representation of women and men from diverse backgrounds;
  - 11.5. put in place internal codes of conduct, including sanctions, complaints procedures and trained contact persons, prohibiting abuse, harassment, sexism and all other forms of discrimination, and collect data on incidents and the outcomes of cases reported;
  - 11.6. implement targeted actions to engage with male political party leaders as allies, working with female leaders towards abolishing the harmful practices and stereotypes that persist in the organisational culture of political parties.
12. As regards its own functioning, the Assembly invites its political groups to consider implementing the measures listed in paragraph 11 above, as appropriate.
13. The Assembly asks the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly to:
- 13.1. consider carrying out a new joint study with IPU to assess the progress made in combating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, following an intersectional approach;
  - 13.2. consider carrying out a gender-sensitive audit (using the tools referred to in paragraph 10.1.4 above) and an inclusivity audit of the Parliamentary Assembly;
  - 13.3. provide training to staff to raise awareness of the needs of members, experts and visitors with disabilities and reduced mobility who participate in Assembly meetings and events;
  - 13.4. consider possible measures to make its work accessible to persons with visual impairments.
14. The Assembly invites the committee on Rules, ethics and immunities and the Bureau to consider taking the necessary steps to enable the online participation in committee meetings of members who are unable to attend in person due to care responsibilities, including caring for children under the age of three.

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Maryna Bardina, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. Women and men working in parliaments, like in all other fields of life, face the challenge of combining professional and personal life. The ability of parliaments to create the conditions for achieving a work-life balance plays a key role in ensuring inclusive participation and gender equality, as well as other forms of equality and inclusiveness.

2. My own experience as a young woman parliamentarian and the challenges that I and others like me have had to face to fulfil our vocation as politicians and legislators, have been a strong motivation behind this report. Affirmative action to ensure more equal participation of women and men in parliament has been taken up in my country, and has yielded rapid results in achieving better gender balance. The war has of course created new challenges (i.e. an enormous displacement of persons within Ukraine and abroad, a humanitarian crisis, massive shelling of civilian infrastructures by Russia, war-related sexual violence). Alongside this, we are also seeing the changing roles of men and women in decision making at all levels. This is confirmed by opinion polls in Ukraine indicating that, as of November 2023, over 79% of Ukrainians wanted to see a better balance between women and men in political life. This figure had increased from 66% in December 2021. However, problems remain across Europe, as hurdles dissuading women from engaging in political activity remain.

3. Common challenges have also shown that change is urgent and can be implemented in practice. During the periods of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions to protect public health were a push factor to use technology, which saw an increased use of remote communications and conferencing, and the development of new systems for secure remote voting, for example, to assist and increase participation. I would like to note that throughout Russia's aggression against Ukraine, such innovative systems ensure the continuous and stable work of the parliament in my country.

4. I have considered the question of inclusiveness by focusing on gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies and attitudes. Deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs remain visible in places of power and authority, which perpetuate gender inequality and can lead to harassment and violence. There is also a tendency to mistrust very young politicians, while at the same time ageism against older persons in decision-making institutions is not uncommon. The same prejudices apply to women parliamentarians and staff who want to combine motherhood with their careers in public service. Men in politics increasingly advocate for strengthening their role as fathers and for being more active in family life, which may also trigger public criticism as those roles do not conform to "traditional" views about men and their role in society. Such negative attitudes can compound to create multiple prejudices and discrimination that result in the need to take an intersectional approach to combating sexism and gender inequalities in parliamentary and political life.

5. The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly is very well placed to examine these problems and to find answers to make our political institutions more inclusive, and therefore more democratic. Relevant previous work by the Parliamentary Assembly includes [Resolution 2589 \(2025\)](#) "Women in the economy: employment, entrepreneurship and gender-responsive budgeting"; [Resolution 2386 \(2021\)](#) "Enhancing participation of women from under-represented groups in political and public decision making"; [Resolution 2274 \(2019\)](#) "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment"; [Resolution 2222 \(2018\)](#) "Promoting diversity and equality in politics"; [Resolution 2155 \(2017\)](#) "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue"; [Resolution 2111 \(2016\)](#) "Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation"; and [Resolution 1921 \(2013\)](#) "Gender equality, reconciliation of private and working life and co-responsibility".

### 2. Working methods

6. Many of the enabling factors for inclusive participation in parliamentary life are related to logistics and procedures. To this end, a questionnaire was sent to member and observer parliaments through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) to get an overview of the situation at the national level. The questions were grouped around three themes: the adaptation of infrastructure to provide inclusive accessibility; the adaptation of parliamentary procedures to encourage inclusive working practices; and the fostering of inclusive attitudes. 35 replies to the questionnaire from 30 member States were received in 2022, which gave me useful insights into the situation in national parliaments. The Assembly is currently preparing a report on violence against politicians which is likely to address the attacks against women politicians and their families. Such violence, very often carried out anonymously and online, attacks democracy and aims to silence women in the public sphere, even leading them to withdraw from political life.

7. Finally, I am grateful for the experts who participated in the two hearings organised in 2024 to get first-hand information from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the Office for Democratic

Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), respectively, about their work to improve gender equality in national parliaments and political parties.

### 3. Towards gender equality in national parliaments

8. One of the six strategic objectives of the [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for 2024-2029](#) focuses on the need to achieve “balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life”. Such “balanced participation” is defined as requiring a representation of either women or men in decision-making bodies – in political or public life – not falling below 40%.

9. However, the current Council of Europe Strategy sets as an operational objective that member States “ensure equal participation of women and girls, men and boys in political and public decision making”. The Strategy refers to the fact that men set the political priorities and that political culture “continues to be structured around patriarchal patterns that create and reinforce structural inequalities between women and men”.<sup>3</sup>

10. The Assembly already supported the principle of gender parity as “the ultimate goal in political representation”, in its Resolution 2111 (2016) “Assessing the impact of measures to improve women’s political representation”.

11. In May 2023, the Council of Europe member States adopted a set of Principles for Democracy at the Reykjavik Summit, which also refer to the need for “equal” participation of women in political and public life. Principle 10 calls for member States to ensure “full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life for all, in particular for women and girls, free from violence, fear, harassment, hate speech and hate crime, as well as discrimination based on any ground”.<sup>4</sup>

12. At the United Nations (UN) level, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) affirms women’s equal right to participate in political and public life. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women grants them equal right to vote, run for office and hold positions without discrimination. A development in this field was General [Recommendation no. 40 \(2024\)](#) on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, adopted by the CEDAW Committee in October 2024, which includes a “roadmap to parity 50:50” between women and men, and it calls for the adoption of “a parity strategy at local, national, regional and international levels, and corresponding National Action Plans for parity in all spheres of decision-making with a tangible objective of parity by 2030”.

13. In October 2012, the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) adopted a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments.<sup>5</sup> IPU defines gender-sensitive parliaments as those responding to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, methods and work. Gender-sensitive parliaments have no substantive, structural or cultural barriers to women’s full participation and to gender equality. Such parliaments set a positive example and are more efficient, effective and legitimate.

14. In 2016, IPU published a gender-sensitive self-assessment toolkit<sup>6</sup> to help parliaments identify their strengths and weaknesses, as taking stock is the first step to draw up and implement a roadmap for reform, with specific objectives, actions and deadlines.

15. In 2018, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) launched its own online self-assessment tool on gender-sensitive parliaments<sup>7</sup> to identify how gender sensitive they are, how to improve the situation and monitor progress towards achieving gender equality. The tool is structured around five areas measuring different aspects of gender sensitivity of parliaments, from equal opportunities to enter the parliament and influence the parliament’s working procedures, to gender-sensitive legislation. EIGE’s online self-assessment tool can be used by national parliaments, regional parliaments with and without legislative capacity, and the European Parliament.<sup>8</sup>

16. EIGE regularly collects data on gender-sensitive parliaments in the European Union member States, ahead of each European parliament election. In June 2024, EIGE published a comparative report about gender equality in the national parliaments of European Union countries and in the European Parliament, with 2023 data.<sup>9</sup> This report highlighted that progress towards gender-balanced representation in national parliaments is slow, with only one woman for each three members of national parliaments (MPs). In addition, only 4% of MPs

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe, “[Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029](#)”, paragraph 66, May 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, “[Reykjavik Principles for Democracy](#)” (Appendix III of the Reykjavik Declaration).

<sup>5</sup> IPU, “[Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments](#)”, 26 October 2012.

<sup>6</sup> IPU, “[Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit](#)”, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> EIGE, “[Self-assessment tool on gender-sensitive parliaments](#)”, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> A general version of the self-assessment tool can be used by civil society organisations supporting awareness-raising and advocating for gender equality in parliaments and political parties, as well as by academics working on gender and politics, and gender and institutional transformation.

<sup>9</sup> EIGE, “[Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union – 2023 state of play](#)”, 3 June 2024.

are aged under 30, and 37% of them are young women. Based on this data, EIGE designed a new tool to help parliaments develop, implement, monitor and evaluate gender equality actions plans to promote gender mainstreaming in institutional structures.<sup>10</sup>

17. As part of its [Gender Statistics Database](#), EIGE regularly monitors the representation of women and men in decision-making for the 27 European Union countries, the UK, six candidate countries (i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, and Türkiye), one potential candidate (Kosovo<sup>11</sup>) and the remaining three EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). Data on political decision-making as regards parliaments, governments and political parties, at European and national levels, are updated quarterly.

18. ODIHR has also developed tools and activities on the inclusivity of parliaments and political parties, including the guide “Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region”,<sup>12</sup> which addresses gender-sensitive representation, lawmaking and oversight, and provides case studies and good practices. The report puts forward ways to improve the gender sensitivity of parliaments, including through self-assessments, audits, and parliamentary reforms. Furthermore, ODIHR can support the setting up and developing of parliamentary committees and caucuses, and they carry out capacity building for under-represented groups of women politicians, such as young women and Roma women.

19. Even though significant progress has been made as regards the participation of women in parliamentary and political life in Europe, it remains slow and uneven. There are challenges that prevent further and faster progress, including democratic backsliding and the backlash against women’s rights. The ongoing shift in Europe towards more right-wing populist politics and the rise of anti-gender movements promoting the traditional family model, risk undermining progress and even backtracking.

20. Other issues of concern relate to the fact that not all national parliaments have gender equality bodies, and that they make limited use of gender mainstreaming tools (such as gender budgeting and gender impact assessment). Furthermore, gender segregation in parliaments persists, as women are less likely to chair parliamentary committees, and they continue to be mostly present on committees addressing social and cultural issues.

21. Another relevant issue for some Council of Europe member States is the legal restriction on women employees who are pregnant or have children under a certain age, and which prevents them from going on business trips or working extra time when they agree to do so. Such paternalistic provisions are allegedly aimed at protecting women’s rights, but in practice they restrict their working rights.

22. One of the main barriers to faster inclusion of women in national parliaments is the growing level of violence against women politicians,<sup>13</sup> mostly online, and targeting also the politician’s family. The [2024 Gender Equality Index](#), published by EIGE, confirms that violence faced by women politicians and public figures has a detrimental impact on the active participation of women in political life.

23. In October 2018, IPU and the Assembly published a joint study on “[Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe](#)”, which indicated “a very low level of reporting” of harassment and violence, pointing also to the lack of mechanisms in national parliaments for women to turn to. The study concluded with a joint call asking national parliaments to carry out their own studies on these issues and to step up their efforts to prevent and combat gender-based violence in politics, as well as in society as a whole.

24. The Assembly should carry out a new joint study with IPU to assess the progress made in combating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, following an intersectional approach.

25. In 2021, the Assembly already signalled the lack of participation and representation in political and public decision making of women with disabilities; young women; lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI) women; Roma women; women of colour; women with an immigration background; women belonging to minorities; women from rural areas; and women with a lower socio-economic background.<sup>14</sup>

26. In April 2024, the Summit of Women Speakers of Parliaments took place in Palma, Spain, bringing together women Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union (European Union) member States and the European Parliament, to exchange views on women’s leadership in public life. The

<sup>10</sup> EIGE, “[Gender Equality Action Plans for Parliaments: Step-by-step tool](#)”, 2024.

<sup>11</sup>\*All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

<sup>12</sup> ODIHR, “[Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region](#)”, 6 December 2021.

<sup>13</sup> ODIHR, “[Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region Toolkit, Tool 1: Introduction to Violence Against Women in Politics](#)”, 27 November 2022.

<sup>14</sup> [Resolution 2386 \(2021\)](#) “Enhancing participation of women from under-represented groups in political and public decision making”, paragraph 2.



[Joint Declaration](#) adopted at the Summit advocated for “the promotion of parity within parliamentary Chambers”, both as regards the number of women MPs and the membership of the steering and functioning bodies of the Chambers, as well as concerning the membership of delegations to international assemblies.

27. It is also my firm conviction that full gender equality in parliamentary life will not take place until and unless male politicians become more numerous and visible as active champions of gender equality in politics. This is a collective goal that benefits society as a whole and, therefore, all persons engaged in politics should be agents of change to build more inclusive parliaments and political parties.

### **3.1. The role of political parties**

28. As it is often said, political parties are the “gatekeepers” of democracy. Without inclusive political parties we will not get inclusive parliaments in terms of women’s representation, in all their diversity, as well as regarding minorities and other groups in society. Political parties decide on electoral lists and their choices determine to a large extent the final outcome of elections as concerns gender-balanced representation. Political parties themselves need to take transformative action to become truly democratic and inclusive in order to fully reflect the society they aim to represent in elected governments and parliaments.

29. In my opinion, it is crucial not only to encourage political parties to create so-called “women’s wings”, but also to promote equal representation of women and men throughout all organisational structures, and to amend the statutory documents of parties, as necessary. Political parties should provide equal access to financial, media, technical and other resources for women and men. Furthermore, affirmative actions could be applied to support party’s members from under-represented groups.

30. EIGE’s report on national parliaments, published in 2024,<sup>15</sup> refers to women being less likely than men to be put forward as candidates for parliamentary elections, as they account for an average of 34% of candidates for the most recent elections across 20 European Union countries. Political parties continue to lack gender-equal representation in their leadership. [EIGE’s statistical brief on gender balance in politics](#), from November 2024, indicates that women leading major political parties in the European Union rose from 16% in 2011 to 25.8% in 2024, but men still hold three out of four leadership positions.

31. In 2014, ODIHR published a Handbook aimed at promoting women’s participation in political parties,<sup>16</sup> which highlighted the importance of internal political party reform. The Handbook provides an overview of voluntary measures that political parties can adopt to improve gender equality within party structures, processes, policies and activities, so that both women and men can enjoy equal opportunities to participate in political life at the national level. The Handbook addresses obstacles which prevent women from advancing as political party leaders and candidates for elected office: lack of internal party democracy and transparency, lack of gender sensitivity in candidate selection and outreach, and failure to decentralise party decision-making processes.

32. The ODIHR Handbook makes recommendations for action, such as measures to improve transparency, fairness and equity in internal party rules, procedures, policies and practices; voluntary measures to support women’s political participation; the institutionalisation of gender equality in party processes and policies; and gender-equality mechanisms within the party, such as women’s sections. In addition, the most effective strategies to increase women’s participation in political parties involve co-operation: between male and female party members; across party lines on issues of mutual concern; and between political parties and external actors, such as civil society organisations.

33. At the end of 2024, ODIHR released a gender audit methodology for political parties,<sup>17</sup> which includes an online questionnaire for political parties to carry out their own gender audits and develop gender action plans, so that they can identify areas where further action is needed. The tool provides good practices from the OSCE region, and it can serve as a roadmap for improving gender equality within political parties.

## **4. Accessibility of infrastructure for inclusive participation in national parliaments**

34. Reflecting on the need for change to enable equal participation of women and men in parliaments, it also became clear to me that there are other factors of discrimination which prevent certain people from active involvement in politics. Persons with disabilities are often hindered by the lack of accessibility to buildings and facilities, which also poses problems to people with reduced mobility and young parents. The difficulties are often amplified by the fact that many national parliaments are located in historic, often classified buildings, which can complicate restructuring and adaptability-related works.

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<sup>15</sup> See note no. 9 above.

<sup>16</sup> ODIHR, “[Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties](#)” 7 July 2014.

<sup>17</sup> OSCE, “[Transforming political parties from within — Gender audits and action plans — Tool 2](#)”, 8 August 2024.



35. In 2017, the Assembly adopted a ground-breaking Resolution on the political rights of persons with disabilities.<sup>18</sup> All the recommendations put forward then should be fully implemented and followed up, as concrete action remains necessary to achieve a higher participation of persons with disabilities in political and public decision making. As reflected in the replies to the questionnaire, accessibility of parliamentary premises and procedures is not yet a reality in many member States, and it is urgent to revert this situation.

36. Political parties can play a very important role, and they should demonstrate commitment to making political life more diverse and representative of the country population, including persons with disabilities. To enhance inclusion, political parties could establish committees representing persons with disabilities, and they should also promote participation and encourage persons with disabilities to stand for election and offer them positions on electoral lists. Persons with disabilities are an important part of the electorate and political parties should aim to create a culture of political participation on equal terms.

37. In my view, we should also call for a holistic approach to accessibility, which encompasses the physical accessibility of public buildings and the accessibility of information about electoral processes, voting procedures and political programmes in easy-to-read and easy-to-understand versions, with sign interpretation upon demand and subtitles for videos. Procedures need to be adapted to persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and requirements for voter registration should not prevent anyone from participating. Sufficient funding should be allocated to ensure overall accessibility, even in times of austerity.

38. It is good to note in the replies to the questionnaire that many member States have taken into consideration the accessibility to parliamentary buildings of persons with reduced mobility. Many have renovated their premises or are considering accessibility issues when designing new buildings. Some countries with old parliament buildings of historical and cultural importance have made great efforts to adapt them. Austria is a good example, also as regards buildings that serve as temporary parliamentary accommodation. Most member States have ensured the accessibility to parliamentary premises for persons with reduced mobility, even if this does not always apply to all entrances.

39. As regards the accessibility of parliaments for children and youth, in most countries there is no specific procedure or requirements for children under 18 to access parliamentary premises. Usually, children need to be accompanied by an adult, whether on an individual basis or as part of a school group. On the other hand, when this procedure is complicated or takes a long time, it can be an obstacle to access the premises of the parliament or committees for employees or parliamentarians with children.

40. Family rooms and childcare facilities in parliamentary buildings can contribute to MPs and parliamentary staff achieving a work-life balance by reconciling their legislative work and family responsibilities, making parliaments a more inclusive place to work. It is also important to eliminate from the national legislation any limitation for female employees with children to participate in business trips or to work paid overtime.

41. Few countries (such as Portugal, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom) provide nursery facilities and, when they do, it is a paid service. Some parliaments have unguarded playrooms. Most national parliaments have spaces for baby changing or feeding (at least toilets equipped with baby changing facilities). However, a large number of States do not have any such spaces.

42. Most respondents indicated that they provide information on their websites, or upon request, as regards the accessibility by MPs, staff and visitors to parliament buildings, including facilities for people with children. However, it should be noted that many countries replied negatively to this question.

#### **4.1. Some examples from national parliaments**

43. Austria adapted their parliamentary building, and their temporary buildings, to become accessible for people with disabilities. MPs, staff and visitors get information about accessing the building. Even though there are no special procedures for accessing the parliament building for children and youth under 18, security personnel are advised to treat children and youth with special care.

44. Denmark, like Austria, does not have special procedures for the access of children under 18, but the security officers take into consideration that children and young people need different information and treatment.

45. The Slovak Republic has a special procedure for the access of small children to parliament, as they do not need to go through the metal detector.

46. Switzerland has a special procedure for children under 16, who do not need ID to enter parliament premises.

<sup>18</sup> [Resolution 2155 \(2017\)](#) “The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue”.

47. Belgium is an example of countries that ensure the accessibility of parliamentary buildings for persons with reduced mobility, but not always for all entrances.
48. Cyprus provides access for persons with reduced mobility, but further changes will take place as a new parliament building is under construction.
49. In Estonia, an employee is called to receive the visitor with reduced mobility and to accompany them when accessing the building. The same applies for Slovenia.
50. In Estonia, there is also an unsupervised children's playroom in parliament, for children between 5 and 10 years of age. This room is equipped with toys, books, TV and DVD-player and it has also a small kitchenette. All children who use this room are under the responsibility of the parent.
51. In France, there is no nursery in the parliament building (a proposal was made, but it was abandoned due to high costs and other reasons). The French parliament provides a financial contribution to MPs and staff who need a nursery so that they can use the three private nurseries near the parliament.
52. In Serbia, MPs with reduced mobility can access the parliamentary building only through the back entrance. They can only seat in the last row of the parliamentary hall, which is adapted to their needs. There is no nursery in the parliamentary premises, which is partly due to its consideration as a historic building, which complicates the necessary adaptation works.
53. The German parliament has wheelchairs available on loan. A condition of employment for staff working in public relations is to know how to respond to the needs of severely disabled visitors, including knowing how to use the assisting devices available. A nursery is also available in the German Bundestag: a day care facility for children from six months to six years old. Administrative, political staff and parliamentarians can register their children for childcare in this Bundestag Kindergarten. There are also several baby care and playrooms available in the Bundestag, which can be used by MPs and staff.
54. In Greece, there is a crèche and nursery school in the premises of the main building of parliament. This service is available to the children of MPs, and those of parliamentary personnel, subject to availability. A three-member committee, set up by the President of the Parliament, registers the children and ensures the good functioning of the crèche and nursery school.
55. A paying nursery is available in the parliaments of Portugal, Spain, Türkiye, and in the UK.
56. Sweden has a free-of-charge nursery in the parliament.
57. In Ukraine, there is a free-of-charge children's playroom in the premises of parliamentary committees, which is currently not in use due to the security situation. There is no specific procedure for granting access to children under the age of 18 to administrative buildings or official premises of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Work is ongoing to change the admission of children under 14 and accompanying persons.

## **5. Adaptation of parliamentary procedures to foster inclusive policies and practices**

58. The 2012 IPU Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments<sup>19</sup> already recommended a number of measures in order to ensure that MPs and parliamentary staff can enjoy better work-life balance, including to give MPs who breastfeed the opportunity to use a proxy vote, or vote pairing, so that they need not attend the parliamentary session; re-arrange parliamentary meetings to allow for the return of MPs to their electorates so that they can have more family time; avoid meeting schedules with late voting; and align sitting times with the school calendar. The IPU also highlighted the importance for men and women MPs to be entitled to - and de facto enjoy - parental leave. However, the reality still remains far from these recommendations in many of our member States.
59. The situation was confirmed by the 2024 EIGE report on gender equality in national parliaments,<sup>20</sup> which identified family leave provisions in half of the national parliaments in the European Union, indicating that where they exist, such provisions are often dependent on MPs having the status of public employee or civil servant. Few parliaments provide proxy and remote voting, or limitations to working hours and sitting schedules that could facilitate better reconciliation of caring and professional responsibilities.
60. The presence of women or men with infants in the parliament, the possibility of bringing infants to work, the availability of dedicated spaces for breastfeeding, changing, or nursery care are all very relevant indicators of how inclusive parliaments are as regards the need to conciliate professional and personal life for MPs who are also parents. Combining work with raising an infant remains a challenge for most working citizens, and members of parliament are not an exception. I was interested in the views of colleagues on what should be improved in the parliamentary functioning in their country, to determine whether parliaments are open to

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<sup>19</sup> See note no. 5 above.

<sup>20</sup> See note no. 9 above.

advocating the rights of persons with children, persons with disabilities and other minority groups, or whether there are prejudices against them.

61. Most of the replies received stated that MPs are not allowed to access the parliamentary chambers with an infant, although many parliaments do not have specific provisions on the issue. Nevertheless, some member States are discussing it, which is an encouraging sign (the Parliament of Ukraine is currently discussing whether to allow MPs with newborns in the voting chamber).

62. Many parliaments can provide appropriate assistance for MPs or staff with hearing and/or visual impairments (e.g. sign language, accessible websites, braille language, etc.), while many others do not have specific measures for visually impaired persons. Some parliaments reported that assistance is provided only during plenary or special parliamentary sessions.

63. In addition to those issues, the questionnaire sent by ECPRD asked for information regarding the possibility of remote voting, proxy voting, pairing agreements between parties (to balance absences) or other options for members with imperative reasons for their absence (e.g. parental leave, women MPs who breastfeed, etc.). Most parliaments do not allow remote voting, mostly because of transparency issues. However, remote voting or hybrid meetings were exceptionally authorised in several countries due to Covid-19 restrictions.

64. Parliaments do not usually impose sanctions for non-participation in debates and votes. In most countries, parliamentarians have a right of absence for imperative reasons (i.e. illness, business trip, parental leave, death or illness of a family member, etc.). In such circumstances, MPs must inform the President/the Speaker of the Parliament about the reason for their absence. However, there can be sanctions for those who neglect their duties with no justification (including financial sanctions).

### **5.1. Some examples from national parliaments**

65. In Austria, while measures have been taken as regards persons with hearing or visibility impairments in the Parliament, there are none for parental leave and family-related difficulties. Members of the National Council and the Federal Council cannot take parental leave and there is no policy as regards breastfeeding during plenary meetings. There is also no possibility for remote voting.

66. In Serbia, the law provides for a special break for breast-feeding, which also applies in the National Assembly. However, working hours do not take account of young parents' needs.

67. Estonia uses Artificial Intelligence to provide real time subtitles for persons with hearing impairments.

68. In Germany, the Bundestag appointed an Inclusion Officer to assist MPs with severe disabilities.

69. Greece reported that remote voting (by signed letter or fax) is allowed in certain cases: when votes are nominative, and when a qualified majority is required to take a decision. These rules also apply to pregnant MPs during the last month of gestation and the month following the birth.

70. Iceland provides individual support to MPs with disabilities (examples from the past: a visually impaired MP was given a dog; an interpreter was employed by the parliament while a person with a hearing impairment was sitting as a substitute MP).

71. In North Macedonia, the Parliamentary Institute organises an annual round table with some of the associations of persons with disabilities, to discuss their concerns. Teaching lessons on sign language for MPs and staff who are directly involved in the relations of the Assembly with the public are also provided.

72. Spain has a framework agreement with a number of civil society organisations so that persons with visual or hearing impairments can have full access to information on parliamentary activities, including all documents produced by the lower chamber.

73. Slovenia was considering remote voting for MPs on parental leave. If members do not attend the sessions, they are not entitled to receive payment/other remuneration, regardless of the reason. Slovenia also reported not having sanctions for the non-participation in sessions of the National Council, its commissions and interest groups.

74. In Spain, the parliament's bureau can authorise an MP, in writing, to vote remotely, after personal verification in plenary session, in the cases of pregnancy, maternity, paternity or serious illness, which would prevent the MP from carrying out his/her parliamentary tasks, taking into account their personal situation. This is possible for votes that cannot be fragmented or modified and whose modalities can be foreseen and planned.

75. As regards remote voting and vote by proxy (after Covid-19) in a non-emergency context, proxy voting is available in France, Georgia (only in plenary sittings), Greece (by letter or fax, as mentioned above), Spain (remote voting in case of parental leave or illness, as explained above), and Hungary (only in committee meetings, not in plenary sittings). The UK House of Lords and House of Commons also allow for remote voting

of MPs with disabilities. The House of Commons allows proxy voting in case of parental leave, and informal pairing agreements. Belgium allows for remote voting and participation. Substitute voting is also possible. In Romania, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have kept the option of remote voting, which had been introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

76. In Lithuania, the meetings of parliamentary committees and commissions can be held online or in a hybrid format, but remote or proxy voting is not possible for plenary sittings.

77. After the last parliamentary elections in the UK, the House of Commons agreed to establish a “Modernisation Committee” in July 2024, to “consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices; and to make recommendations thereon”. Discussions address working hours (i.e. consideration of “family-friendly hours”), parliamentary culture, accessibility issues, and voting methods.

78. In Ukraine, the administrative buildings of the parliament are adapted for persons with reduced mobility by means of: a call button at the entrance; ramps giving access to the first floor; an elevator to access all other floors, including the plenary meeting hall and conference rooms; a turnstile, a motorised platform, and hydraulic vertical lifting platforms to access the first floor and then elevators can be used to access all floors. MPs with reduced mobility have their voting places at the side lodge of the voting chamber. The design of the Parliament’s website was carried out taking into account the needs of people with visual impairments, according to the applicable standards.

## **6. Fostering inclusive attitudes in parliamentary life**

79. One of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes target 10.2, whereby States committed to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” by 2030.

80. Most replies to the questionnaire affirmed that parliamentarians are aware of the need for inclusive practices and infrastructure as a democratic requirement, and that relevant measures have been taken in this regard. However, some parliaments pointed to a lack of data on this matter, which they found regrettable.

81. Most national parliaments have a code of conduct for parliamentarians, including general provisions concerning the way MPs should perform their duties, but few of them explicitly mention sexism or sexual harassment (e.g. Cyprus, Greece, North Macedonia, Switzerland). National parliaments usually have general provisions about discriminatory practices and set ethical guidelines about respectful treatment. In addition, some national parliaments have a specific body or a dedicated officer responsible for the implementation and monitoring of non-discriminatory practices.

82. When asked about the main obstacles to introducing more inclusive facilities and procedures (e.g. budget, politics, traditions and customs), the replies to the questionnaire varied a lot across countries. Several countries reported no data available on this issue or indicated that it had not been looked into at all. Some member States pointed to financial, technical or esthetical obstacles while others argued that there were no obstacles whatsoever. Some countries recognised that “a lot remains to be done on a wider, societal level” (Cyprus), and that “politics, traditions and customs” could be obstacles (Lithuania). In their comments, a few countries underlined that the process of making parliaments more inclusive was of great importance to them and that progress was underway.

### **6.1. Some examples from national parliaments**

83. Belgium’s parliament carried out an internal analysis of gender-related issues. Two working groups addressing the needs for a gender-sensitive parliament were set up in the Senate and the Lower Chamber, to carry out a horizontal screening of all relevant aspects of parliamentary life and the internal functioning of the Chamber and the Senate, covering legislative services, documentation, internal and external communication, management of infrastructures and human resources, heritage, etc. An audit report to assess the integration of gender equality concerns in the Federal Parliament was jointly commissioned in 2021 by the Presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, where it was discussed on 22 December 2023.

84. In France, an external anti-harassment unit was set up for MPs, accessible 24/7 by phone and through a dedicated website. The team includes lawyers and psychologists, and its aim is to listen and advise those who request it, and eventually accompany them through the relevant procedure if they choose to report it. Its mandate covers allegations of sexist behaviour, sexual assault, moral or sexual harassment. Victims can report the facts to the Parliament’s deontologist, who can also intervene and contact the presumed aggressor.

85. In the UK, a “Parliamentary Behaviour Code” is promoted through posters, leaflets and electronic communications. In 2018, the training programme “Valuing Everyone” was rolled out across parliament to ensure that everyone understands, recognises and prevents bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. This training has been updated and a seminar for new MPs and new staff (“The Behaviour Code, why it matters”) was launched in 2022, as well as a supporting awareness programme. The UK Parliament has also

introduced an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), in response to allegations about inappropriate behaviour. The ICGS applies to incidents of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct by and against any member of the parliamentary community,<sup>21</sup> in connection with their parliamentary activities. An independent review about the ICGS was published in May 2024.<sup>22</sup> The ICGS and its helpline are quite unique among our member States. In May 2024, the Standards Committee of the British Parliament published the [report of an inquiry](#) into the processes that regulate the conduct of MPs, which is complex as it involves at least 14 bodies, three Codes and numerous sets of rules. The report made a number of recommendations to simplify the system and to make it more accessible both to MPs and the wider public.

86. In 2020, the Icelandic parliament conducted a study on the working environment for both MPs and staff, which demonstrated the need to address sexual and gender-based harassment and bullying in parliamentary premises. A new Strategy and Action Plan were prepared, in consultation with all political parties, and adopted in May 2023, including preventive actions and guidelines on handling cases of sexism and harassment, and ensuring that the complainant has access to advice and support throughout the procedure. In addition, Icelandic MPs and parliamentary staff receive training courses on diversity, equality and inclusion.

87. In May 2024, the Irish Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life – which included members of parliament, local councillors, civil society representatives, media and other experts – published a report with 16 recommendations to make participation in Irish political life safer.<sup>23</sup> The Task Force was set up in response to increasing levels of abuse, including online abuse, harassment and intimidation experienced by those who participate in political life. The Task Force concluded that “abuse in political life is prevalent, problematic and targeted disproportionately at women and minority groups”.<sup>24</sup>

88. Denmark reported having a whistleblower mechanism in parliament.

89. In Serbia, MPs belonging to national minorities can address parliament in their mother tongue if they announce it in advance.

90. In Ukraine, there is a practice of conducting training sessions on gender mainstreaming and gender expertise for parliamentary staff. Furthermore, the Human Resources Strategy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, adopted in 2019, includes conducting an annual gender audit, training employees, developing methodological recommendations and manuals, and appointing specialists responsible for ensuring gender equality standards in parliamentary divisions.

## 7. Inclusive participation in the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament

### 7.1. The Assembly

#### 7.1.1. Gender representation

91. Balanced gender representation is key to achieving gender-inclusive parliaments. In 2021, the Assembly adopted Resolution 2394 (2021) “Gender representation in the Parliamentary Assembly” according to which, since January 2023, the Assembly’s delegations from member States need to “include a percentage of women as members that is at least equal to the percentage in its parliament”, “or, if this is more favourable to the representation of women, to respect the minimum ‘one in three’ principle for the representation of women in national delegations”. The percentage of female members rose to 46% in 2024.<sup>25</sup> By April 2025, this percentage reached 47.7%. In Resolution 2394 (2021), the Assembly formally undertook to require a minimum of 40% of women in all delegations, as from January 2026.

92. These rules have had a clear positive effect on the representation of women in the Assembly, as the overall representation of women in committees, as full members, rose from 41% in 2022 to 47% in 2023 and 50% in 2024. The percentage of women rapporteurs had increased from 36% in 2022 to 43% in 2023, but it went down to 40% in 2024. Positive obligations as regards the representation of women in parliaments are clearly effective and can contribute to increasing gender inclusivity in parliaments.

93. Resolution 2394 (2021) introduced another important feature: country delegations are only authorised to propose male vice-presidents of the Assembly if the delegation includes at least 40% of female MPs. Rapporteurs in committees and ad hoc committees had to comprise at least one-third of women. Resolution 2594 (2025) “Modification of various provisions of the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure”, adopted in April 2025,

<sup>21</sup> This includes people who work for or within Parliament, including Members and staff of both Houses, Parliamentary Digital Services, as well as contractors and visitors.

<sup>22</sup> ICGS, “[Independent review of the ICGS](#)”, 13 May 2024.

<sup>23</sup> The Report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life can be accessed [here](#).

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, at page 36.

<sup>25</sup> Parliamentary Assembly, “Gender equality in the functioning of the Assembly in 2024”, Information document prepared by the Secretariat, As/Ega/Inf (2025) 02, 17 January 2025.

modified Rule 16.3 to promote gender equality in senior roles. It now establishes that “For every three successive Vice-Presidents that a national delegation proposes, at least one must be a woman, and one must be a man”.

94. Furthermore, Resolution 2386 (2021) “Enhancing participation of women from under-represented groups in political and public decision making” emphasises the need to adopt an intersectional approach in promoting women’s access to and participation in political life, as women from minorities and women with disabilities are still overly under-represented. This resolution also stressed the importance of applying a zero-tolerance policy for violence, discrimination and abuse. Back in 2019, the Assembly adopted Resolution 2274 (2019) “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment”.

95. The Assembly has also endeavoured “to ensure gender balance in expert panels and other bodies with two or more members”.<sup>26</sup>

#### *7.1.2. Infrastructure accessibility*

96. Renovation works in the Assembly’s hemicycle were concluded in 2024, to adapt it to the French regulations concerning accessibility for persons with reduced mobility. The main Council of Europe entrance is accessible by wheelchair, and there are lifts to all floors. However, not all areas of the Palais de l’Europe building used by Assembly members, including the hemicycle, are fully accessible to persons with reduced mobility using wheelchairs.

97. The Rules of Procedures of the Assembly regulate the “Access to the Palais de l’Europe and use of offices” (Appendix XVIII), covering the safety and security aspects of accessing Council of Europe premises and movement within them, including the Paris office, and of course the hemicycle (“Chamber”) and meeting rooms of the Assembly’s Committees. As the Council of Europe premises fall under the responsibility of the Secretary General, I would like to invite the Secretary General to undertake a review of the accessibility of Council of Europe premises for persons with disabilities and reduced mobility, including the Paris offices, and consider whether any improvements are needed to ensure an accessible and inclusive environment for Assembly members and persons attending meetings and events in Council of Europe premises. I welcome the preparation of a publication to inform persons with disabilities and reduced mobility about accessing the premises of the Council of Europe, which is under way.

98. There is no specific rule for members of the Assembly to access the premises with an infant, but this can be requested. There is also no set procedure regarding access to the Assembly for children under 18, apart from the need to be accompanied by an adult. I would also like to invite the Secretary General to undertake a review of the accessibility of Council of Europe premises for persons with infants and children, and to consider establishing rules on this issue, to ensure transparency and predictability, while guaranteeing an inclusive environment.

99. There are no nursery facilities in the Assembly’s premises (nor in the Council of Europe as a whole), and no baby changing or feeding rooms. I understand that a “family room” in the Palais building is envisaged, which I welcome. As these are also issues under the responsibility of the Secretary General and which affect the whole Council of Europe, and not just the Assembly, I would like to invite the Secretary General to consider the possibility of setting up nursery facilities and making available one or more baby changing/feeding room/s in Council of Europe premises.

#### *7.1.3. Inclusive policies and attitudes*

100. In Resolution 1921 (2013) “Gender equality, reconciliation of private and working life and co-responsibility”, the Assembly recognised the persisting inequalities that women face in the workplace, compared to their male counterparts, and member States were encouraged to introduce conciliation measures between family and work life, for the benefit of women and men. These measures could include offering assistance services for dependants, as care work is mostly carried out by women; a parental leave scheme to ensure shared responsibility in the family; and ways to make work more flexible and adaptable to different family situations, such as flexitime or teleworking.

101. The Assembly allows for remote voting only in exceptional circumstances. Voting by proxy is prohibited, but substitute members may be appointed, with the right to vote.

102. I consider that members with parental care responsibilities over children under the age of three, should be allowed to participate in committee meetings online, upon request. I would like to invite the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities to consider this issue, either through the interpretation of the existing Rules or the consideration of possible amendments.

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<sup>26</sup> [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality”, paragraph 15.



103. The Assembly does not provide information in Braille language. There is no specific provision for assistance to parliamentarians or staff members with hearing and/or visual impairments. I would like to invite the Secretariat of the Assembly to consider possible measures to redress this situation, taking into account what is financially feasible.

104. In November 2018, the Assembly launched an initiative to counter sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments: [#NotInMyParliament](#), at the initiative of the then PACE President, Liliane Maury Pasquier. The aim was to raise awareness of the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment and their impact on women parliamentarians, as well as to call for action to stop sexism in parliaments. This initiative followed the publication of a joint regional study by the Assembly and the IPU which revealed alarming levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women in national parliaments (see paragraph 23 above).

105. Recommendation 2152 (2019) and Resolution 2274 (2019) “Parliaments free from sexism and sexual harassment” raised awareness about the issue, put forward concrete recommendations for action to address the situation, and drew attention to obligations to uphold women’s rights, including the right to a life free from violence.

106. Two specific follow-up actions were taken: (i) the modification of the Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly to introduce the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct, and the obligation to take account of the Council of Europe rules on the protection of dignity; and (ii) the review of the Assembly Guidelines for the observation of elections, to ensure that violence against women, sexism and sexual harassment are systematically taken into account in the context of election observation by the Assembly.

107. In December 2022, the Council of Europe adopted a [Code of Conduct](#) and a [Policy on Respect and Integrity](#). Staff members of the Assembly, members of national delegations, as well as visitors, are expected to uphold the standards of conduct set out by the Council of Europe, which establish that the Organisation “will not tolerate any disrespectful behaviour”. In May 2023, a Council of Europe [Policy on “reporting wrongdoing and protection from retaliation”](#) (“Speak up”), was also adopted. In addition, an internal Policy on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion entered into force on 1 May 2025.

108. The Assembly’s Rules of Procedure establish that each member must sign a written statement subscribing to the aims and basic principles of the Council of Europe and undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly. (Rule 6.2.c).

109. Resolution 2594 (2025), mentioned in para. 93 above, also aimed to strengthen the youth perspective in the Assembly’s work. As a result, all committees may appoint a youth rapporteur to present the youth perspective in discussions on reports.

110. The Assembly’s Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities is preparing the report “Increasing members’ active participation in and contribution to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly and its committees”, with Ms Petra Bayr as rapporteur. Possible actions that could be pursued in this context are training programmes, information brochures, and mentoring initiatives to assist members of the Assembly. Such trainings and mentoring activities could include the implementation of existing codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms in case of sexism, sexual harassment, sexual violence and misconduct.

## **7.2. European Parliament**

### *7.2.1. Gender representation*

111. In 2022, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution on gender mainstreaming, referring to EIGE’s self-assessment tool (see paragraph 18 above) and calling for an audit “to map the situation in terms of gender equality and gender mainstreaming”, including recommendations for both the political and administrative sides of the European Parliament. The Resolution also indicated that the audit “should cover all the areas and indicators developed in the EIGE’s ‘Gender-sensitive parliaments’ toolkit”.<sup>27</sup>

112. The EP adopted a Gender Action Plan in 2020 and a related “gender roadmap” for the years 2021-2022, with monitoring reports drafted bi-annually. Furthermore, since 2003 each parliamentary committee has appointed one of its members to be in charge of gender mainstreaming. Since 2009, the designated members have formed the Gender Mainstreaming Network (GMN).

113. The EP achieved gender balance (41% women, 59% men) for the first time following the 2019 elections. However, for the first time the European Parliament elected in June 2024 saw a decrease in the number of female members of the EP (MEPs) (38.5% women), with big differences among European Union countries:

<sup>27</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament](#), 12 March 2022.



Sweden elected 61.9% of female MEPs (13 out of 21), while Cyprus elected male MEPs exclusively (6 out of 6).

114. As the elections are organised in each European Union member State according to national electoral rules, the challenge of achieving gender parity in the EP needs to be met at the national level. This situation also applies to the representation of minority groups—in the EP, which also needs to be addressed at the national level.

115. There has been an ongoing debate about the possibility of introducing European Union legislation to ensure a uniform approach across European Union countries for the election of MEPs, which could facilitate the integration of gender equality provisions. In 2022, the EP adopted a proposal for an European Union Council regulation on the election of the MEPs, setting up common rules for EP elections in the European Union member States, including through quotas and zipper lists. Such changes require unanimous support from European Union countries and have not yet been agreed. Infrastructure accessibility

116. The European Parliament grants public access to in-person or online events and debates. According to the EP website, its visitors' centre is fully accessible to persons with disabilities. The hemicycle in Brussels is accessible to persons in wheelchairs, and other disabilities. Special assistance and sign language interpretation can also be granted if the EP is notified in advance. The EP premises in Strasbourg are open to persons with disabilities as well.

117. Similarly to some national parliaments, even if the rules of the EP do not foresee access to the debating chamber of MEPs with infants, the President can de facto allow it.

118. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult to enter the EP buildings. The EP's diversity roadmap refers to its nurseries being accessible and inclusive towards children in all their diversity, such as children with disabilities.

#### *7.2.2. Inclusive policies*

119. The rules of procedure of the EP state that “the allocation of speaking time in the plenary shall take into consideration the fact that Members with disabilities might need more time” (Rule 178). The EP is making its working practices more inclusive, for example by making sure that emergency communications and emergency situations are also inclusive towards persons with disabilities, including persons with hearing or visual impairments.

120. The EP has taken steps to implement policies that increase the gender sensitivity of its premises, such as providing childcare facilities accessible to MEPs and parliamentary staff. Such nursery facilities, accessible for the children of MEPs and staff, must be paid for (fees are calculated on the basis of family income and situation).

121. A diversity roadmap was prepared by the EP secretariat, which mentions parental leave for parents with disabilities, or parents with children with disabilities, or for parents who do not qualify for maternity or adoption leave. The EP has an internal “gender roadmap”, based on a gender equality action plan, which refers to the need to improve work-life balance. The Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Unit (EIDU) of the EP promotes and monitors staff policies on gender equality.

122. As regards voting rules, MEPs must cast their vote “individually and in person”, therefore remote voting, proxy voting, pairing agreements between parties to balance absences or other options for members with imperative reasons for absence (parental leave, women MEPs who are breastfeeding babies, etc.) do not seem possible in the current frame.

123. The EP has also a roadmap to increase diversity within its secretariat, with a focus on disability, sexual orientation and anti-racism. The measures included in the roadmap cover recruitment procedures, the EP's traineeship programme, and internal and external communication. This roadmap is an internal document providing guidance for a more inclusive work environment in the EP, and its overarching goal is to mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion in the EP's work by adopting an intersectional approach to increasing diversity at all levels (traineeships, recruitment, work and family life of staff, etc.).

124. The EP secretariat has a disability contact point to provide a one-stop-shop to EP staff for any assistance requests and queries related to disability. Similar contact points have also been established for LGBTIQ+ and anti-racism issues, respectively, which reflect the administration's commitments to these topics.

#### *7.2.3. Inclusive attitudes*

125. MEPs have to sign a declaration in relation to the [Code of Appropriate Behaviour](#), which is Annex II to the EP's [Rules of Procedure](#). Rule 10 states that MEPs must “refrain from any type of psychological or sexual harassment and shall respect the Code of Appropriate Behaviour” when exercising their duties.

126. The Code of Appropriate Behaviour explicitly mentions that MEPs must behave “with dignity, courtesy and respect and without prejudice or discrimination” towards “everyone working in the European Parliament”. The Code establishes that MEPs need to co-operate fully to manage situations of conflict or psychological or sexual harassment, including by responding promptly to any allegations. MEPs should take part in specialised trainings on preventing conflict and harassment in the workplace.

127. The EP has a policy against sexual and psychological harassment, with two internal advisory committees responsible for dealing with harassment complaints involving MEPs and staff members. The aim is to ensure no harassment among MEPs, in relations between MEPs and staff, or among staff members.

128. The EP’s Rules of Procedure also include a Code of Conduct for MEPs regarding integrity and transparency. The Code sets out as its guiding principles that MEPs must act only in the public interest and conduct their work with disinterest, integrity, openness, diligence, honesty, accountability and respect for the European Parliament’s dignity and reputation. The EP President can refer to an Advisory Committee the possible breaches of the Code of Conduct by MEPs.

129. In April 2024, the MEPs approved the creation of an Interinstitutional Body for Ethical Standards in charge of developing, updating, and interpreting common minimum standards for ethical conduct, and for publishing reports on the implementation of these standards by each signatory body, which includes the European Parliament and other European Union institutions.

## **8. Conclusions**

130. My report aims to raise awareness about the need to make parliaments in our member States fully accessible and inclusive as regards their premises, their composition, and their internal policies and working practices, so that they can best fulfil their role as key democratic institutions and duly reflect the societies they represent – which is unfortunately not yet the case. This includes allowing women parliamentarians to enter political life, to stay in politics and to reach decision-making positions and leading roles in parliaments, free from violence, while combining it with their family obligations on the same basis as male parliamentarians.

131. Our national parliaments, like our Assembly and the European Parliament, should be inclusive workplaces free from sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, and all other forms of discrimination. Their internal rules and regulations should reflect this and provide adequate mechanisms and tools to prevent discrimination, and to address it through adequate reporting and sanctioning procedures.

132. My focus on making parliaments fully accessible to members, staff and visitors with disabilities, persons with reduced mobility and children should also be a priority in our member States, as accessibility and inclusiveness are democratic imperatives in the 21st century.